



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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Steve Goldstein (O) 202-343-6416  
(H) 202-887-5248

### INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN SEEKS NEW FUNDING TO SAVE NATION'S SHRINKING WETLANDS

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan said today he will seek authorization to create a new trust fund to provide interest to buy wetlands essential to the future of now declining North American waterfowl populations.

Speaking to the American League of Anglers and Boaters in Washington, Lujan proposed using the interest on the money collected under the Pittman-Robertson Act to assist wetland purchases under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a joint U.S.-Canadian agreement on waterfowl restoration efforts.

The Pittman Robertson Act (officially, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act) was authorized in 1937. Under the Act, monies collected from excise taxes on the sale of sporting firearms, ammunition, archery hunting equipment and handguns is allocated to the states for a wide variety of wildlife restoration projects.

Lujan noted in his speech that unless a special trust fund is created, funds would continue to be disbursed from the Treasury account based only on the amount received in taxes. Under the Secretary's proposal, which would require Congressional authorization, collections would go into a special trust fund and the interest earned used for wetlands purchases under the joint ventures and public-private partnerships authorized by the North American Waterfowl agreement. The amounts collected in taxes would continue to be allocated to the states.

Lujan told League members that stopping the depletion of wetlands is a top priority for the Bush administration, which has a goal of "no net loss of wetlands." The urgency of the effort is illustrated, he said, by the fact that last year's fall flight of ducks was only 66 million, down from the early 1970's average of 80 to 100 million.

In fiscal year 1989, almost \$120 million is being apportioned to the states, commonwealths and territories under the Pittman Robertson Act. In a trust account this amount could have earned up to \$10 million in interest.

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